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Kiger, Willis

Willis Kiger 'can't kick'

Biography JUL 14 1985

At the age of 101 and 6 months, Willis Kiger sits at a round table in the dining room of Westridge Healthcare Facility, sips black coffee and watches the activity around him. He is dressed up in beige trousers and shirt and a brown sport coat.



KIGER

"I feel tolerable well," he says. "I drink a lot of coffee. It makes me feel better. I can't kick. I have had hard times and good times."

He likes his coffee black and "as hot as I can drink it."

He also loves to dance. "I've got great rhythm to my soul and it makes me feel good ... I like violin, guitar and dance music. Mostly waltz, is what I do. I have a lot of partners."

Kiger shares his philosophy of life: "I tried to be honest and righteous. I worked where I could

make the most money honestly, at mechanics and on the railroad. I built railroads, too.

"Mother taught me if I was fair, square and honest, people would treat me right. I've been prosperous ...

"Mother taught me wonderful things."

Kiger twirls the empty coffee cup in one hand. "I've been all around every place, might as well say I've been around the world. I never had much education. I had to do the best I could. And I done pretty well. I just tried to hold on to those who were right."

Kiger helped install the first railroad tracks to the former Davis Gardens. He also worked at the paper mill here about 21 years.

A resident of Westridge nine years, Kiger says, "I can do anything I start to do, but here lately I haven't done much work."

He is quiet as he gazes out the window into the sunny morning. "Some days I feel kind of blue, but the Lord stays with me." — Penny Blaker Mitchell

Kim Drew, Johnnie
S JUL 4 1978

Century Of Life Celebrated

By CINDY L. BAUM
Star Staff Writer

This Fourth of July will be a special one for Johnnie Kimbrew and residents of Canterbury Convalescent Center, 500 Maple Ave.

Miss Johnnie, as she is called by friends, will celebrate her 100th birthday along with the nation's 202nd birthday.

Born July 4, 1878, on the "Sippy river" in Alabama, Johnnie lived with her parents and 12 brothers and sisters.

Johnnie married early and had a son who came to Indiana. His death at age 16 brought her to Terre Haute.

Residents and staff at Canterbury are giving a party for Miss Johnnie. One of her gifts is a rocking chair from the staff. When she received the chair, Johnnie giggled and told how her mother used to get angry with her for rocking all the time in their chair.

Johnnie also received a birthday card from President and Mrs. Carter.

Johnnie appears very cheerful at age 100 and likes to giggle, spreading joy to those around her. "She's very special to everyone here," said one Canterbury employee.

Johnnie's tiny stature and fragile appearance may fool visitors but inside, as the staff and residents of Canterbury know, she is spry and full of life.



(Star Photo: Kadel)

Johnnie Kimbrew will celebrate with friends today

Kimbrew, Johnnie

KAIRNS, BESSIE

She'll Be 100 Oct. 4

Kairns, Elizabeth

Vigo County Public Library

Bessie Kairns Proud of Her Age

By JACK HUGHES

Tribune Staff Writer

Miss Elizabeth Kairns has a birthday coming up.

Oct. 4 is the big day at the Vigo County Home where she resides.

And while other ladies—and not a few men—tend to change the subject when the question "How many?" naturally follows, or maybe try to hide a few candles, Bessie Kairns is proud of her age.

She has a right to be.

As has anyone who manages to keep going for a hundred years. And this birthday is Miss Kairns' 100th.

If she has the secret of longevity, she's keeping it a secret. Asked what it might be, she replied, "Oh, I don't know, I just keep going."

Well, maybe that's it. And it could be that her devoutly religious nature contributes its own ingredient to the secret formula. With eyesight failing for several years, she nevertheless manages to read from her Bible and Massal daily and to attend Mass in the chapel at the home regularly.

On her birthday, however, the dining room at the home will take over as "chapel" temporarily to accommodate her many friends and relatives expected to attend the special Mass to be celebrated by three priests, each representing one of the local parishes in which Miss Kairns has lived. The celebrants will be the Rev. Michael Bradley of Sacred Heart, the Rev. David Lawler of St. Ann's and the Rev. John Elmer of St. Joseph's parish.

Bessie Kairns was the second of nine children born to her parents and the first of the brood born in the United States, in Carbon, Ind. Tom and Ann (Dalton) Kairns had come to America from Ireland, by way of England where the first child was born. The rest of the children added to the family in Carbon where their father was a coal miner.

First-hand witnesses to miraculous developments in world history and technological advances since that period in the 19th Century include Bessie and her brother, John, her closest relatives still living, who resides in Crown Point.

Miss Kairns came to Terre Haute 80 years ago, after completing grammar school in Carbon, and found the first of several housekeeping positions with prominent local families, including the Frank Paddocks who operated a floral business.

She also worked in Chicago and in Indianapolis. It was during her stay in the Indiana capital, in 1927, that she suffered a severe injury when her wrist was caught in the door of a streetcar which dragged her for some distance. A fractured hip was among the injuries and brought the requirement of a cane, limiting her subsequent

employment to light housework.

In addition to Carbon, she has lived near Blackhawk and Lewis in this area as well as in Terre Haute, including an apartment on N. 7th St., where she resided before advancing years recommended nursing home care. She

made the County Home her home since March 1, 1966.

Aside from interest in the home and all the residents, Carl Koile has another reason to take special note of next Wednesday and Miss Kairns' birthday — it's his birthday, too. He just hasn't accumulated quite as many. However, with increasing evidence of likely longevity at the home, he might set his own record.

Meanwhile, on the subject of starting her second hundred years, Miss Kairns maintains the calm confidence and attitude of acceptance which characterize her victory over severe injury and a century of living.

As stated on several earlier occasions, she figures she'll have as many more birthdays "as God intends."

Looking decades younger than her century of life would suggest she should, Bessie has a bright Irish smile for visitors. One of those smiles shined, especially bright for a recent visitor, her doctor, whose report was "excellent health."

Other regular recipients of warm greetings include Mr. and Mrs. Carl Koile, County Home administrators, for whom Bessie and many others have high praise.

It's a happy, comfortable room she shares with Mrs. Stel-

la Nolte, her roommate for the past four years or so. Companionship, congeniality and care contribute their qualities to that happiness.

Miss Kairns keeps in touch with the rest of the world through the visits of friends and relatives and by reading THE TRIBUNE, she reports.

Community Affairs File

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